



**Rhode Island Department of Education's
Child & Adult Care Food Program**

Planning Healthy Meals and Snacks Using the Meal Pattern

Welcome to the Rhode Island Department of Education's (RIDE's) Child and Adult Care Food Program, also known as CACFP.

In this presentation, we will review what it means to plan healthy meals and snacks using the CACFP Meal Patterns. We'll discuss basic nutrition information and the importance of including a variety of healthy foods in meal and snack planning.

This presentation is one in a series of trainings on CACFP. Other videos address the following topics:

- What is RIDE's Child and Adult Care Food Program and who qualifies for it?
- Appropriate meal patterns for infants, children and adults
- Ensuring the civil rights of children and adults participating in the CACFP programs

CACFP Meal Patterns

The CACFP meal pattern helps you plan well-balanced, nutritious meals and snacks that meet children's and adults' nutrition and energy needs. Meal patterns have been developed according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

A meal pattern has two parts:

Part 1: Types of foods that are served

In the CACFP, the types of foods are grouped into four Food Groups. They are as follows:

- Fluid milk (or for infants, iron fortified formula or breast milk)
- Fruits and vegetables
- Bread and bread alternates
- Meat and meat alternates



Part 2: Serving (or portion) sizes

- The minimum portion size for each food group must be served; the portion size varies with the age of the children.
- Together, the Food Groups and the Portion sizes equal the CACFP meal pattern.

Planning Healthy Meals

Currently, Americans consume too much sodium and too many calories from foods and beverages with solids fats, added sugars and refined grains.

Healthy eating means replacing these with healthy, nutrient-dense foods and beverages.

Healthy menus should include a variety of vegetables, fruits and whole grains, skim or 1% low-fat milk (for children 2 years and older) and more lean meats and poultry, seafood, eggs, beans & peas, and nuts & seeds.

What follows are recommendations of the types of foods to consider in your meal planning. They meet CACFP meal pattern requirements and represent healthier food choices. To assist you, at the end of this module you'll be able to print down a listing of all the foods we're going to be talking about.

Let's start with the Milk Food Group:

In the CACFP, children from 1 up to 2 years of age receive whole milk.

Skim milk or 1 percent low-fat milk is served to participants 2 years of age and older.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are served daily. The best menu will include variety of vegetables and fruit in your meals over the course of the week.

Vegetables

To help you think about the variety of vegetables to use in your menus, we'll talk about the following vegetable groupings:

- Dark Green
- Red & Orange
- Dry beans & peas also called legumes



- Starchy vegetables
- And Other vegetables

Dark Green Vegetables pack a lot of nutritional value. That's why you're encouraged to feature them in your menu at least twice a week. As you see, there are many to choose from. Many are great in salads!

Here are some of the more popular dark green vegetables:

- Broccoli
- Collard greens
- Dark green, leafy lettuce
- Kale
- Romaine lettuce
- Spinach

Red and orange vegetables should also be served at least twice a week. They include:

- Several types of squash (acorn, butternut and hubbard)
- Carrots and sweet potatoes
- Red Peppers, tomatoes and tomato juice

Serve mature Beans and Peas (legumes) at least once a week. As you can see, there are many varieties to choose from. Once these dry beans and peas are cooked, they can be added to many dishes (soups, salads, chili, burritos, beans & rice) or served as a vegetable side dish like baked beans or hummus!

Legumes are very versatile and nutritious. They can be considered either a vegetable or as a meat alternate.

Because the dark green, red & orange vegetables and the legumes are great nutritional choices and served more frequently, you can offer starchy vegetables less frequently. Starchy vegetables include:

- Corn
- Green peas



- Lima beans
- White Potatoes

Round out your weekly menu by including some of these other vegetables which could include:

- Cabbage
- Celery
- Cucumbers
- Green beans
- Green peppers
- Iceberg lettuce
- Zucchini

Fruits

Currently, children through age 18 consume more than half of their fruit as juice. Although 100 percent fruit juice can be part of a healthful diet, it lacks dietary fiber and when consumed in excess can contribute extra calories.

When developing your menu, limit how often you serve juice. Instead, choose from any variety of the following:

- Unsweetened fresh fruits
- Frozen, unsweetened fruits
- Canned fruits packed in juice or water
- Dried fruits (if they do not pose a choking hazard) without added sugars, fats, oils or salt

If you do offer juice, it should be unsweetened, 100 percent fruit juice.

Grains and Bread

Whole grains are a powerhouse of nutrients and dietary fiber. Bread and bread alternate food items containing whole grains should be your first choice when planning your



menu. Every day, and over the course of the week, make at least half of the bread and bread alternate items whole-grain rich. The best way to tell if an item is whole grain rich is to look at the first ingredient on the label. Here are some of the more common whole grains which include:

- brown rice
- Oatmeal, rolled oats and whole oats
- whole-grain corn
- whole wheat

There are a variety of whole grain breads, cereal, crackers, pasta, sandwich buns & rolls, waffles or French toast, and muffins available.

Note that foods labeled "multi-grain," "stone-ground," "100-percent wheat," "cracked wheat," "seven-grain," or "bran" are usually not whole-grain products.

A word about refined and enriched grains

If whole grains are refined (processed) they lose some of their nutritional value. Because of this, CACFP requires that any grains that have been processed must be enriched. This means certain B vitamins and iron are added back to the grain after processing.

Check the ingredient list on refined grain products to make sure that the word "enriched" is included in the grain name. For example, whole-wheat flour becomes white flour when processed. For the CACFP, white flour needs to be enriched; look for enriched white flour on the label. Listed are foods that are made with refined grain and need to be enriched to be served in the CACFP.

- Cornbread
- Corn flakes cereal
- Corn and flour tortillas
- Cornmeal
- Crackers
- Pasta



- White bread, buns & rolls and pita bread
- White rice

The last group of foods is the Meat and Alternates group.

They are great sources of protein. Lean forms of meat and poultry should be eaten to decrease the intake of solid fats.

Because the fats in seafood, nuts and seeds are considered oils (not solid fat) they are considered a healthier choice.

Avoid fried dishes and processed items such as cold cuts, hot dogs, sausage.

Meat & poultry

Look for lean meat among these meat options:

Examples of good choices from fish & shellfish include:

- Cod
- Haddock
- Halibut
- Pollock
- Salmon
- Tuna

Meat alternates are great protein sources that can also be offered in the CACFP:

Chicken eggs are a meat alternate.

Cheese is another meat alternate.

Look for reduced fat, low fat, nonfat and lite versions of cheese, cheese foods and cheese spreads. Some choices include:

- American
- Mozzarella
- Cottage or Ricotta



- Parmesan or Romano

With regard to labeling, don't be fooled. If the label says imitation cheese or cheese product, the product does not meet CACFP requirements and it won't count towards meeting your meal pattern.

Dry beans and peas are part of the vegetable group, but you can also use them as a meat alternate. Commercially prepared tofu may also be offered. On the day you serve them in the CACFP, you can count them as a vegetable or a meat alternate, but not as both. Either way, they're a great choice.

Yogurt (Plain or flavored, sweetened or unsweetened, Greek and soy) are all acceptable and may be offered as a meat alternate.

Nuts & Seeds are another meat alternate in the CACFP.

Nuts and seeds are not recommended for children ages 1-3 as they present a choking hazard.

There are numerous nuts and seeds options to select from.

For example peanuts, peanut butter or reduced-fat peanut, as well as sesame seeds and sesame seed butter are all meat alternates.

Here are examples of how to improve a menu based on the information we've presented.

This "before" menu offers chicken nuggets, fries & apple juice and white bread. All of these foods are allowed on the CACFP, but let's see how it might be improved upon.

This menu still offers chicken, but it's now roasted, not fried. A lower-fat option.

The fries are now sweet potatoes, an orange vegetable.

The apple juice is gone and replaced with fresh apple slices.

White bread has been swapped out for a whole wheat roll.

Both menus offered skim or 1% low-fat milk.

Let's look at one more lunch example:

Here we're gone from chicken nuggets to a chicken burrito.

The white bread is now a whole wheat wrap.



It's topped with 1 oz. of chicken, some cooked black beans and low-fat cheese. This is a great example of using a lower fat meat, and healthy meat alternates like beans and low-fat cheese.

The fries have changed to tomato salsa, an orange vegetable with fresh orange slices for dessert.

Here are some examples of healthy snacks. Instead of milk and saltine crackers, you can offer a yogurt parfait or low-fat cheese and whole wheat crackers.

All are acceptable CACFP snacks, but the yogurt parfait and cheese & crackers are examples of better menu planning.

Variety in Meal Planning

Variety is one key to success in meal planning. Education is another. We suggest you instruct the children or adults in your care on proper nutrition and model proper nutrition and portion control in your own meal patterns. In other words, no diet soda and chips for you while serving healthy, nutritious snacks and meals to those in your care.

For more information about planning healthy meals go to:

USDA Team Nutrition Fact Sheet

www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/dgfactsheet_hsm.html

Information on Menu Planning:

The USDA Team Nutrition site at:

www.healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/menu-planning-0

The National Food Service Management Institute at:

www.nfsmi.org/Templates/TemplateDivision.aspx?qs=cEIEPTc=

Information on Whole Grains

www.healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/menu-planning/whole-grains/background-information

USDA Food Buying Guide

www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/foodbuyingguide.html



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Want to know more?

- “Planning Healthy Meals and Snacks Using the Meal Pattern” is one in a series of presentations the Rhode Island Department of Education provides to sponsors. We encourage you to review all of our presentations:
- “What is RIDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)?”
- “Meal Patterns for Infants”
- “Meal Patterns for Children”
- “Meal Patterns for Adults”
- “Civil Rights Requirements for RIDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Program”